

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 3, 2021

1:36 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Lora Reinbold, Chair  
Senator Mike Shower, Vice Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Robert Myers  
Senator Jesse Kiehl

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Senator Roger Holland  
Representative Andy Josephson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 14

"An Act relating to the selection and retention of judicial officers for the court of appeals and the district court and of magistrates; relating to the duties of the judicial council; relating to the duties of the Commission on Judicial Conduct; and relating to retention or rejection of a judicial officer."

HEARD AND HELD

OVERVIEW: DISASTER DECLARATION~ EXTENSIONS & LIABILITY RELATED TO COVID-19

HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 14

SHORT TITLE: SELECTION AND REVIEW OF JUDGES

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) SHOWER

01/22/21 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21

01/22/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/21 (S) JUD  
02/03/21 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

SCOTT OGAN, Staff  
Senator Mike Shower  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a sectional analysis on SB 14.

KATHLEEN CAMPBELL, representing self  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on the impacts of COVID-19 mandates from a teacher's perspective.

SARAH PRICE, Student  
Eagle River High School  
Anchorage School District  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on the impacts of COVID-19 mandates from a student's perspective.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:36:46 PM](#)

**CHAIR LORA REINBOLD** called the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:36 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Hughes, Shower, Myers, Kiehl and Chair Reinbold.

CHAIR REINBOLD recognized Representative Andy Josephson.

#### **SB 14-SELECTION AND REVIEW OF JUDGES**

[1:38:24 PM](#)

CHAIR REINBOLD announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 14, "An Act relating to the selection and retention of judicial officers for the court of appeals and the district court and of magistrates; relating to the duties of the judicial council; relating to the duties of the Commission on Judicial Conduct; and relating to retention or rejection of a judicial officer."

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CHAIR REINBOLD recognized Senator Holland.

[1:39:47 PM](#)

SCOTT OGAN, Staff, Senator Mike Shower, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

[1:40:00 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER introduced SB 14. He read the sponsor statement, as follows [Original punctuation provided]:

Alaska's constitution is clear, Superior Court Judges and Supreme Court Justices must be vetted by the Judicial Council and the Governor can only select from a list of two or more submitted by the Judicial Council. However, the Constitution also left the door open for legislative discretion with jurisdictional issues with how Appellate Court and magistrates are selected and how all judges are screened. Currently, the Judicial Council prescribes 100% of the screening criteria. One section of this bill gives direction to the Judicial Council on that subject.

Currently, Magistrates serve at the discretion of the Chief Justice, and Appellate Court Judges are nominated in a statute defined process that mirrors the Constitutional Judicial Council process. The Judicial Council is structured to give a permanent majority of Bar members the control of who gets to be a judge or Justice. Additionally, judge's names are subject to a Bar member-controlled prescreening process. Bar members are appointed internally by the Bar with no legislative or administrative oversight. Non-Bar members (the public) are in a minority position to influence final decisions.

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SENATOR SHOWER remarked that this essentially meant that three attorneys and three non-attorneys, with the Alaska Supreme Court justice acting as tie-breaker, could make the final decision or basically that four attorneys make the final decisions on judges.

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SENATOR SHOWER continued to read the sponsor statement:

Senate Bill 14 strikes more of a balance in letting the governor and the people have a small say in who sits in judgment on the bench when they appear before them. It allows the governor to appoint and the legislature to

confirm who fills magistrates and appellate judges. It still allows the JC to recommend candidates, but the governor does not have to appoint them. The governor can appoint his own appellate judges.

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This bill also takes the judicial retention rating process from the Judicial Council, and gives it to the Commission on Judicial Conduct, as the Judicial Council ratings tend to be noncritical. The CJC receives complaints about judges, and they are the best qualified to rate them.

With judicial elections deemed "nonpartisan" virtually no political effort or mechanism to mount such effort, is ever directed toward educating the public about activist judges during their retention election.

A conflict of interest may arise with evaluating attorneys because when lawyers on the Council rates a judge with a critical rating, will that lawyer ever get a fair hearing before that judge? It has to be a factor in the backs of their minds.

The sponsor respectfully suggests that lawyers may have a conflict of interest when they rate judges for retention. The Sponsor also very respectfully suggests that a better group to write reviews of a judge's performance would be the Commission on Judicial Conduct. They are the people that field complaints about judges. Critics of this legislation will say it politicizes the process. But with recent rulings affecting political races, that ignore or nullify clear legislative intent, there is little doubt the justice process is politicized and needs some balance from the representatives and governors that the people elect.

1:43:42 PM

At ease

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CHAIR REINBOLD reconvened the meeting. She said she was having a hard time hearing the sponsor's testimony. She said people must socially distance themselves in committee, but she will allow people to remove their masks.

SENATOR SHOWER agreed to remove his mask. He asked if he should repeat his testimony, but no one answered.

1:45:06 PM

MR. OGAN read the sectional analysis for SB 14.

[Original punctuation provided:

Section 1. Amends AS 15.15.030(10) by adding magistrates to the nonpartisan ballot designed for each judicial district in which a justice, judge, or magistrate is seeking retention.

Section 2. Amends AS 15.35.100 by making magistrates subject to retention election.

Section 3. Amends AS 15.35.110 by requiring a magistrate seeking retention to file a declaration of candidacy for retention.

Section 4. Amends AS 15.35.120 by requiring the director of elections to place the name of a magistrate seeking retention to pay a \$30 filing fee.

Section 5. Amends AS 15.35.130 by requiring the director of elections to place the name of a magistrate who has properly filed a declaration of candidacy on the ballot in the judicial district designated in the declaration of candidacy.

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Section 6. Amends AS 15.35.135 by permitting a magistrate to withdraw from candidacy for retention in writing unless the notice of withdrawal is received less than 64 days before the date of the election.

Section 7. Amends AS 15.58.050 by requiring that the Commission on Judicial Conduct, rather than the Judicial Council, file a statement with the lieutenant governor that includes information about each supreme court justice, court of appeals judge, superior court judge, district court judge, and magistrate who will be subject to a retention election.

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Section 8. Amends AS 15.58.060(a) by requiring magistrate judges seeking retention to pay a \$150 fee

to the lieutenant governor at the time of filing under AS 15.58.

Sections 9 and 10. Amends AS 15.58.060(c) and AS 22.05.100 by replacing "Judicial Council" with "Commission on Judicial Conduct."

Section 11. Amends AS 22.07.060 by authorizing the Commission on Judicial Conduct, rather than the Judicial Council, to conduct an evaluation and provide information and a recommendation regarding a court of appeals judge subject to retention election. Adds magistrate to the positions a judge may not be appointed to for four years following rejection of the judge's candidacy.

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MR. OGAN continued:

Section 12. Amends AS 22.07.070(b) by allowing the Judicial Council to submit the name of a judicial candidate to the governor for consideration for the court of appeals only if the council determines that the candidate understands and is committed to strict constitutional interpretation of statutes and regulations and adhering to legislative intent. Amends AS 22.07.070(a) by allowing the governor to appoint a person who was not nominated by the council, but is qualified under AS 22.07.040, requiring confirmation by a majority of the members of the legislature meeting in joint session, and making an appointment effective upon the later of either legislative confirmation or actual vacancy.

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Section 13. Amends AS 22.10.150 by authorizing the Commission on Judicial Conduct, rather than the Judicial Council, to conduct an evaluation and provide information and a recommendation regarding a superior court judge subject to retention election.

Section 14. Amends AS 22.15.170(a) by allowing the governor to appoint a person to a district court or magistrate vacancy who was not nominated by the Judicial Council, but is qualified under AS 22.15.160, requiring confirmation by a majority of the members of the legislature meeting in joint session, and making

an appointment effective upon the later of either legislature confirmation or actual vacancy.

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MR. OGAN continued:

Section 15. Amends AS 22.15.170(e) by allowing the Judicial Council to submit the name of a judicial candidate to the governor for a district court or magistrate position only if the council determines the judicial candidate understands and is committed to strict constitutional interpretation of statutes and regulations and adhering to legislative intent.

Section 16. Amends AS 22.15.195 by authorizing the Commission on Judicial Conduct, rather than the Judicial Council, to conduct an evaluation and provide information and a recommendation regarding district court and magistrate judges subject to retention election.

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Section 17. Amends AS 22.15.205 to allow the impeachment of magistrates.

Section 18. Amends AS 22.30.011(a) to allow an inquiry into the potential misconduct of a magistrate.

Section 19. Amends AS 22.30.011(b) to allow the Commission on Judicial Conduct to exonerate or admonish a magistrate or recommend counseling and to hold a disciplinary hearing to consider potential misconduct of a magistrate.

Section 20. Amends AS 22.30.011(c) to entitle a magistrate to counsel at a hearing before the Commission on Judicial Conduct.

Section 21. Amends AS 22.30.011(d) to allow for the exoneration or discipline of a magistrate after a hearing described in AS 22.30.011(b).

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Section 22. Amends AS 22.30.011(g) to allow an exonerated magistrate to request that the Commission on Judicial Conduct's proceedings and report be made public.

Section 23. Amends AS 22.30.070 to provide for the disqualification, suspension, removal, retirement, and censure of a magistrate.

[1:52:32 PM](#)

MR. OGAN continued:

Section 24. Amends AS 22.35 by adding a new section prohibiting the use of state funds to support or oppose the retention or rejection of a judicial officer in an election under AS 15. This section does not apply to the duties of the Commission on Judicial Conduct under AS 15.58.050, AS 22.05.100, AS 22.07.060, AS 22.10.150, and AS 22.15.195.

Section 25. Repeals AS 22.15.170(c), AS 22.15.170(d), and AS 22.30.011(h).

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SENATOR MYERS referred to Section 25. He asked why the bill would repeal AS 22.30.011(h). He said this provision creates the reports for judicial conduct, which should be retained.

SENATOR SHOWER deferred to his staff to respond to any technical questions.

[1:55:24 PM](#)

MR. OGAN offered to confer with the Legislative Legal Services attorney and report back to the committee.

[1:56:45 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES related that many of her constituents have raised concerns. She said one could argue that this will politicize the process, but she does not see it that way. The process has already been somewhat politicized. She asked about moving the duties from the Alaska Judicial Council to the Alaska Judicial Conduct Commission (AJCC). She indicated that the AJCC is comprised of three justices or judges, three attorneys, and three members of the public. This means the AJCC consists of six attorneys and three public members, she said. She asked for the composition of the AJC.

SENATOR SHOWER said the AJC is composed of six members, with three selected by the Alaska Bar Association and three non-attorney members. In the case of a tie, the Supreme Court chief justice would cast the tie-breaking vote.



SENATOR HUGHES pointed out that SB 14 would effectively change the decision-making ability to six attorneys and three public members. She asked whether the AJCC would have information on every judicial appointee or judge coming before them. She stated that the AJCC considers complaints against judges. She asked whether the sponsor would be open to some type of combination of duties, such as both the commission and council would have duties.

SENATOR SHOWER answered that the bill addresses this. The AJC would still provide information. AJCC consists of nine members, but the bill does not restrict members to select the names of potential judges. Under the bill, the AJC would make recommendations based on the [nominee's or judge's] record rather than the [Alaska Bar Association] making the decisions. Finally, the legislature, consisting of elected officials, would have the final say. He offered his view that the current process is already politicized, but SB 14 would provide more balance, providing public input.

[2:02:43 PM](#)

MR. OGAN said he could not recall AJC providing any critical views on [prospective judges] and judges. He suggested that the current system creates a bit of a conflict. Since the AJCC makes determinations on complaints about judges, it makes more sense for the AJC to evaluate and recommend judges. He said he is not opposed to Senator Hughes's suggestion to create a hybrid. He stated that this bill would not change the selection structure for Supreme Court justices or superior court judges. This bill relates to selection and retention for the court of appeals, district court, and magistrates.

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SENATOR SHOWER advised members that he is open to amendments to improve the bill.

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SENATOR KIEHL said he looks forward to hearing from the Alaska Court System at a later date. Although the sponsor's staff could not recall the AJC ever issuing any negative reviews on judges, at least three instances occurred in recent years in the communities of Bethel, Anchorage, and Kenai. He stated that SB 14 would treat some courts differently than others. He questioned why the bill would set up a bifurcated system and not include all judges.

SENATOR SHOWER argued that the current system is politicized and gave an example. He then explained that to address all courts would require changing the Alaska Constitution, which would be difficult. He favored having the legislature exercise its constitutional authority by appointing judges to the lower courts. He said he will continue to work on a constitutional amendment, but it may only have a slim chance of passing.

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MR. OGAN opined that the constitutional founders were clear in establishing the Superior Court and ASC appointment process. The founders gave future legislatures discretion since changes might be necessary as the state grew. The bill would establish a bifurcated system because of the prescriptive constitutional sideboards. He offered his belief that clear constitutional authority allows the legislature to establish the court jurisdictions as it sees fit.

He characterized SB 14 as providing a better balance in the selection and retention process. He said the appellate judges handle criminal cases although [the sponsor] is considering an amendment to include civil cases. When a person loses his/her court case, the person can appeal it to the ASC, but that appeal will be limited to issues in which the lower court erred in interpreting a statute or constitutional provision. However, the court cannot consider additional factual information that may arise. Adding civil cases would allow a second opinion, which is closer to how the federal court system operates. At the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), where he previously worked, he often appeared in federal district court and appeals would go to two levels of appeals court, a 3-member panel or an 11-member circuit court, prior to an appeal to the US Supreme Court. This bill moves more toward that federal process. The bill would also ask the AJC to evaluate whether a judge could consider strict interpretation of statutes, regulations, and the Constitution of the State of Alaska. He reiterated that it would provide for a more balanced approach.

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At ease

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CHAIR REINBOLD reconvened the meeting.

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SENATOR KIEHL disagreed with the sponsor that the process is politicized.

He asked for further clarification of the terms, "a strict constitutional interpretation and "adhering to legislative intent." He related his understanding that those terms tend to be judicial philosophies in conflict.

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CHAIR REINBOLD remarked that legislative bills are not supposed to conflict with the constitution, so she did not see any issue with the terms.

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SENATOR SHOWER continued to press his point that the process is politicized and how it happened. Still, he acknowledged it is a matter of interpretation. He asked his staff to speak to the terms listed in the bill.

MR. OGAN said the language regarding strict interpretation is in the bill because of some recent cases. The legislature does not currently give any direction to the AJC.

SENATOR SHOWER offered to provide additional information on the terms at a later date since time is limited today.

CHAIR REINBOLD held SB 14 in committee.

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At ease

**OVERVIEW: DISASTER DECLARATION - EXTENSIONS & LIABILITY RELATED  
TO COVID 19**

[2:21:14 PM](#)

CHAIR REINBOLD reconvened the meeting and announced the next item for consideration, OVERVIEW: DISASTER DECLARATION~EXTENSIONS & LIABILITY RELATED TO COVID-19. She turned to invited testimony to give a perspective on the COVID-19 mandates on teachers and students. She introduced Kathleen Campbell, who has taught at Eagle River High School for twenty years. She said Ms. Campbell was her mentor when she served as a substitute teacher.

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KATHLEEN CAMPBELL, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, said she would provide comments on the impact of the series of emergency executive emergency disaster declarations from a teacher's perspective.

MS. CAMPBELL expressed concern that missing classroom experience during the COVID-19 school closures has adversely affected student academic development and advancement. She said the school districts could not respond quickly to virtual Zoom learning so ASD [Anchorage School District] students missed planned instruction, including 20th-Century history. These students missed civil rights instruction so when the January 6 riots happened; students lacked context.

She estimated that students essentially missed six weeks of contact time. Teachers were teaching four 90-minute Zoom sessions per week during the semester. Instead of 36 weeks of instruction, the courses were condensed into two 8.5 week sessions. Students did not have the means to make up sessions. Students who did not readily understand the material generally lacked teacher access. However, she provided her phone number to students for help.

MS. CAMPBELL pointed out that cheating has escalated because students can search the internet for answers. She expressed concern that students missed out on interpersonal communication skills and collaborative work, including events such as proms, athletic banquets and other extra-curricular activities.

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MS. CAMPBELL expressed concern about student safety since teachers are trained to recognize child abuse. She said some students being taught at home were at risk in their homes. Lastly, she expressed alarm that screen time during COVID-19 reportedly increased by at least 60 percent.

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CHAIR REINBOLD recapped the problems for students during the pandemic, including that student screen time increased by 60-70 percent, high-risk children lacked teacher intervention, social interaction was interrupted and subject content was lost.

CHAIR REINBOLD asked how many teachers currently work in the Eagle River High School building.

MS. CAMPBELL answered that she has physically been in the building most days and routinely saw three to five teachers. Several weeks ago, after some underachieving students returned to the school for labs it increased to 8-9 teachers working in-person.

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SENATOR SHOWER asked if she had any suggests or solutions to improve things.

MS. CAMPBELL emphasized the need to assess risk, open brick-and-mortar schools as soon as possible and reduce the number of students per classroom to allow teachers to provide individual attention. She remarked that some Advanced Placement (AP) students dropped out from a lack of teacher support. She stated that teachers have options to provide for student safety from COVID-19. For example, plastic barriers could be installed around desks. She expressed concern that students are falling behind academically and recommended extending the academic school year as a remedy.

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SENATOR HUGHES reported that the Mat-Su Valley Borough School District (MSBSD) did not close its schools. She has heard anecdotally that some Anchorage families have established temporary residence in the Mat-Su to allow their children to enroll in school in the valley. When a COVID-19 case arises, the schools shift to online classes and then shift back after the quarantine. This transition has gone quite smoothly, she said. She predicted this will result in better academic achievement in the MSBSD as compared to other districts. She asked if any teachers have expressed an interest in working in the MSBSD to teach in-person classes. She offered that the Anchorage mayor and school board appear to be subject to home rule. She understood that the Anchorage School Board (ASB) closed the Anchorage schools, not the Anchorage Assembly.

MS. CAMPBELL answered that all ASB members except for one supported closure. From her perspective, keeping the MSVSD's schools open has worked well. Some teachers, but not the majority, would like face-to-face teaching. However, the teacher's union has a lot of power and some teachers do side with the union, she said. She indeed would have decided to transfer to the valley rather than do online teaching.

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CHAIR REINBOLD stated that Ms. Campbell's views align with the Great Barrington Declaration, a paper based on Sweden's model. She said her constituents expressed concern that students are failing. She advised members that the attorney general approved the disaster declarations and mandates.

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CHAIR REINBOLD asked if she would be a resource for the Senate Education Committee.

MS. CAMPBELL agreed.

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CHAIR REINBOLD introduced an Eagle River High School student.

[2:47:19 PM](#)

SARAH PRICE, Student, Eagle River High School, Anchorage School District, Eagle River, Alaska, gave a student's perspective on the effects of mandates. She read her testimony:

[Original punctuation provided]

My name is Sarah Price and I am a junior from Eagle River High School. I am here today because my education and the safety of Alaska's children has been made into a political game. This committee job is to uphold our laws and fulfill your oath of office to defend not only our national constitution, but our state one as well. In Article 7 Section 1 of Alaska's constitution. It defines the legislature's responsibility to "by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State." Over the last 10 months school which was supposed to serve as every child's safe haven and a source of equal opportunity has diminished to a virtual system in which with mental health issues, discrimination, and neglect are seen as the new normal. When local district and school boards fail this responsibility, the duty to protect our children falls on you.

[2:47:55 PM](#)

In March 2020, schools everywhere were closed because we truly did not know what this virus would bring, but now we do know, and we know schools are safe. The CDC and WHO have recommended since the summer that if possible, communities should send their students back without delay as "the harms attributed to closed schools on the social, emotional, and behavioral health, economic well-being, and academic achievement of children, in both the short- and long-term, are well-known and significant." From NY to Texas and Washington to Florida children have been back in school for months, so why not all of Alaska?

In the Anchorage School District, the largest district in the state, they have fallen back on every back to school plan they have made. In the fall they told the community this was for our safety, but upon inquiry of top administrators, I was informed that it was the teacher unions who would not let them reopen. Despite all that has changed in our community, the same is true today, and they have exploited the citizens' concerns of COVID-19 to keep our doors shut. However, the reality of children with COVID-19 in Alaska is that the ages of 0-19 makeup 27.5 percent of the population yet only 18.5 percent of all cases, 1.6 percent of hospitalization, and 0 percent of deaths. Through closing schools, they are not saving lives, they are ruining tens of thousands.

It is well known and thoroughly analyzed that virtual school is not an efficient method of education. In the Anchorage School District failure rates and absenteeism has doubled in every grade, while in the groups of economically disadvantaged, minorities, and disabled students these numbers are even higher. Even before COVID-19 High School students in my district were 64 percent and 73 percent below proficient in Language Arts and Mathematics. Nationally, Alaska falls 46th in mathematics, 49th in Language Arts, and 50th overall. There is no 51st place, we cannot afford this kind of academic decline.

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And while these grades alone may shock you, I can tell you that far more students can no longer find the motivation to do their work or see a purpose in their lives.

The real safety hazard caused by failed administrative leadership is keeping adolescents in despondent conditions where depression is catalyzed and at home abuse goes unseen. We live in a State where suicide is the 2nd leading cause of adolescent deaths and abuse is far too common. As a result of school closure both these have increased, except you cannot tell through a zoom camera whether someone is suffering--and many are. Other students and I have witnessed a wave of depression and suicidal thoughts spread through our young community. I could sit here and tell you the

tragic stories of students in my community getting on medication and going to therapy instead of school, friends who must constantly convince each other it will get better, and those who we could not save and took their lives, but we do not have enough time.

Knowing for several months what children are enduring alone, only in this last week did my district allow k-2 back. They stated that students do not learn and they need socialization, however, for the other 32,000 students they have deemed these conditions acceptable.

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The legislature fulfilled its Constitutional duties when they created AS 14.03.010, however, if superintendents are allowed to abuse AS 14.03.030 to keep our schools closed in the interest of teacher unions, and if school board members do not have to fulfil their oaths of office as designated in AS 14.12.090, then your efforts nullified. It is up to you to make sure these laws are followed and act accordingly when they are violated.

As representatives of the people, you must come together and stand up to protect our most valuable assets: our children. Teacher unions, politics, and personal agendas must be put aside and we must come together as Alaskans to ensure that every child has a safe place and the opportunities to obtain an education regardless of their zip code or age. Most students are too young or too exhausted to stand up for themselves, so will you stand up for those who do not yet have a voice?

2:52:51 PM

SENATOR SHOWER commended her testimony. He appreciated her raising the issue of domestic violence, depression, and suicide. He hoped she would continue as a student advocate. He acknowledged that the legislature needed to hear suggestions and understand what students need.

2:55:21 PM

SENATOR KIEHL commended her testimony. He appreciated that she provided citations because many testifiers do not do so. He gave an example.



SENATOR KIEHL pointed out that Article 7, Constitution of the State of Alaska, requires the state to provide for public health and welfare. Although Sweden and the United Kingdom kept their schools open, these countries discovered that students brought the virus home to their parents and grandparents. This has had terrible consequences, he said. He asked how the legislature should balance providing for vulnerable Alaskans' public health and welfare with students' social and educational needs.

MS. PRICE answered that risk analysis was important. In this one, while her heart goes out to the vulnerable, students want the choice to attend school. No one is being forced to go back to school, she said. However, the large majority of the people who recovered from COVID-19 did not suffer any symptoms. She continued to press her point that students should have the option to attend in-person school. She argued that the harms of virtual learning far outweigh any risk of spreading COVID-19. She offered her belief that students do not bring COVID-19 from school to home. Instead, studies have shown that the virus is spread at home and later brought to school. In her school district, 80 percent of families considered these risks and chose to send their children to school because of the benefits. She stated that more kids die from suicide than COVID-19.

2:59:00 PM

SENATOR HUGHES gave her an "A+" on that response. She indicated that families with a vulnerable member can make the choice. She said the ASD has options for public and private correspondence and homeschool. She encouraged her to speak before the Anchorage School Board and Anchorage Assembly since school closure decisions are made by them.

MS. PRICE answered that she has called or met with the Anchorage School Board members during the last five months. She reported that one or two members said they were eager to have students return, but others had safety concerns. Cases and hospitalizations have dropped by 50 percent. She said she has heard anecdotally that the teacher's union is responsible for keeping the district schools closed and that teachers do not want to work. She expressed concern that fostering fear also keeps the schools closed. She acknowledged that it is difficult to investigate this. She continued to press her position that it is important to open schools as soon as possible for the sake of the communities.

3:02:07 PM

HAIR REINBOLD spoke in opposition to the disaster declarations and will oppose legislation to do so. She restated her concern that she cannot bear to see the collateral damage and ongoing suffering in her community, including suicides. She congratulated the Mat-Su district for keeping the schools open without a mask policy. She continued to press her position on the Great Barrington Declaration that provides focused protection for vulnerable populations.

[3:05:45 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Reinbold adjourned the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting at 3:05 p.m.